

Racialized Victims of Police Violence and Canadian Media: Racial Victim  
Blaming and Absolving the Police

By  
Matthew Allain

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Approved: Dr. María Gómez.

Assistant  
Professor,  
Department of  
Criminology

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*Abstract*

The purpose of this thesis was to determine whether Canadian news media relied on racist tropes and stereotypes of black people in their portrayal of black men who had died as the result of police violence. Additionally, the thesis wanted to identify the different uses of language that news media uses to absolve the institution of policing. For this thesis, news media articles published by Canadian outlets that pertained to Canadian cases of black men dying because of direct police violence or death exasperated by police violence had their content analyzed. The articles were made up from regional and national outlets and they were themed and coded to identify specific uses of phrases and words that speak to premature or unfounded absolving of the police and victim blaming with overt racist tropes and stereotypes.

What the methods found was that Canadian media often includes irrelevant information pertaining to the victim that is used to implicitly blame the victim for their fate. The thesis also found that specific language tactics were used by these articles to reduce the violence done by the police officers and to remove the officer from the ordeal entirely. This thesis wants to contribute to the literature on the media portrayals of racial minorities and the ways in which implicit racist practices are embedded in societal institutions. The thesis also wanted to shed light on racism and discrimination within Canada that may not be apparent in contemporary society.

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### **Introduction**

Media, specifically news media, can be a great way of attaining information about the world around you. News media keeps their reading public aware of what is going on near them and into the wider world. However, with great reach comes a great responsibility, that being objectivity and a non-biased telling of events being published. However this objectivity and fairness should not just be assumed because it is coming from a recognized news outlet. Non-objective portrayals of certain events or certain people is not foreign to news media and this becomes problematic when those portrayals are influenced by implicit prejudices and biases. These prejudices and biases can have roots in different social, political, and historical contexts that if not acknowledged and discussed, will persist.

What this thesis aims to look at specifically is the way Canadian media portrays incidences of police violence and the death of racial minorities. This is because news media that contributes to discourses on certain sensitive topics can have great influence in forming societal opinions on those sensitive topics because of the reach it has. This topic was decided on because of similar inquiries into news media's (and other media's) portrayal of police killings of black men in the United States. The reason for this thesis being an investigation of similar inquiries in a Canadian context is for two main reasons: I am Canadian and I am of the opinion that Canadian discourse is very sanctimonious in regards to a variety of topics in the United States. I have observed that Canadian discourse acts high and mighty in regards to social and economic division in the United States. The point of this thesis is to determine whether Canadian media relies on racist tropes and stereotypes in their portrayals of racialized victims of police violence,

highlighting one of the many different institutions within Canada that subjugate black people. The aforementioned process is important because if the media is portraying these instances as the result of the victim's evilness, it takes the focus away from an actual critical conversation surrounding policing and racial minorities in Canada. Another topic of interest is the specific language used in news articles that was unnecessary or unwarranted in absolving the police in these cases of police violence. The reason for this is because it speaks to a white dominant institution defending another white institution and demonizing and dehumanizing a racialized person. The overall purpose is to contribute to Canadian media critique and contributing to the examination of how news media contributes to the pervasiveness of the use of racist tropes and stereotypes in the portrayal of racial minorities.

### **Literature Review**

This literature focuses on two main topics or concepts: police brutality and mainstream media's practice of racial subjugation. Literature surrounding police brutality and mainstream media's reliance on racist tropes surrounding stories about racial minorities is somewhat sparse. However, the criticism that mainstream media in the United States received from their coverage of the various killings of unarmed black men by police did not go unnoticed in academia. The reason for beginning the focus on media discourse in the United States as opposed to other countries, is because proximity and language barriers. Canadians can be more overtly exposed to news in the United States that is in the English language unlike news in European countries that are in another language. Specifically, media has been criticized for the demonization they have done of police brutality victims; demonization that cannot even be described as having racial

undertones but rather overtly relying on racist stereotypes. Examples can be seen in various police killings in the United States where media depictions relied on racial stereotypes used for victim blaming purposes: Media coverage of Michael Brown and Eric Garner made references to their supposedly imposing physical stature, coverage of Akai Gurley's murder by police had used a previous mugshot of his and the conditions of where he resided, Tamir Rice had coverage that included demonizing his mother and attributing actions about his behaviour that were outright false, Tony Robinson had media coverage reference his past instances of criminality, and Freddie Gray's coverage made reference to his impoverished conditions and behaviour while being assault by police officers (Smiley & Fakunle, 2016). These particular cases illustrate how unarmed black victims of police violence were being demonized and criminalized in the media for things in their life that were not relevant to being killed by police. Smiley and Fakunle (2016) in their study, focused on primarily four language themes that referenced: the victims behaviour leading up to and during their assault by police, the victims physical appearance, the location of which the victim lived and the location of where the murder took place, and finally the victims lifestyle that could include a reference to past criminal history. Two other operational definitions used by Smiley and Fakunle (2016) to further classify victim blaming language used in articles that relied on racial stereotypes were "micro-insult", defined as "verbal and nonverbal communication that subtly conveys rudeness and insensitivity as well as demeaning a person's racial identity and heritage" (Smiley & Fakunle p.357). The second being the 'micro-invalidation', defined

as “communication that subtly excludes, negates, or nullifies the thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color” (Smiley & Fakunle p. 357).

### **Media and Minorities**

In the book “The Manufacture of News: Social Problems, Deviance and the Mass Media” authored by Stanley Cohen and Jock Young (1981) on how social problems and deviance are portrayed and depicted by media, there is a chapter written by Paul Hartmann and Charles Husband in which they discuss the media’s roll in racial conflict. In the chapter, Hartmann and Husband (1981) assert that the reason media has a role in influencing perception of the general public is because the media is often emphasizing the particular current social situation, reporting with supposed objectiveness, outlets can have wide circulation, and for the most part have a reputation of high credibility. The chapter also argues that the concept of “prejudice” that can be apparent in media or in public discourse is not the result of actions done by the group of which the prejudice is directed at, but rather is a product of the society’s culture that is a result of its colonial past. Meaning that, prejudice against black people in media has its roots in slavery and ongoing racial subjugation rather than black people being inherently criminal as their media coverage would suggest, asserting that criminality is part of the black pathology. This means that this racist coverage of minorities is not a result of an individual attitude but rather an institutional and structural bias. This culture is able to be legitimized and pervasive because of the media’s role in influencing the general public. Hartmann and Husband (1981) make the salient point that the ways that events are reported coincide with how much the actor’s actions involved conform to cultural expectations, and that the actions of people of colour will be reported on more if they are typical of cultural ideas of

race relations. This assertion means that in the case of police brutality, reporting that the racial minority was deserving of their death because of their own criminal behaviour is typical of the colonial cultural sentiment that is pervasive throughout all of society.

Traditionally, media outlets that produce news updated daily or twice daily, online outlets have the ability to be updated essentially 24/7. The news have dropped follow up stories in favour of breaking news in this way. Mainstream media, being media that is established by regional or national news publishing outlets, are very much concerned with threats to social order; and how those threats are primarily minimized by law enforcement actors (Stone & Socia, 2017). One's view on social problems can be framed by news items and the way they are presented. The concept of framing in news stories is the act of taking some parts of the story and making them more important by putting more emphasis on them (Stone & Socia, 2017). Often, news outlets want to promote and place emphasis on individual morality and personalizing conflicts. When important or salient points are emphasized to the general public they are influencing their standards by which they evaluate political leaders and government; this is known as priming which leads into agenda setting, which is the concept of the correlation of the objects that are framed by media outlets and their importance with the general public (Stone & Socia, 2017).

In an analysis done by Wilson (1997) on media tropes produced by Canadian media on black basketball players found this idea of what it means to be a "good black" and a "bad black" were pertinent. Good black basketball players included narratives of them breaking away from their rough beginnings and overcoming their conditions. However, race was not central to any of these portrayals and thus the ability of these good



black basketball players to persevere and become successful was illustrated as a personal choice made by these players and thus there were no structural inhibitors faced throughout their racialized life. Bad black players had narratives created that centred on past or ongoing criminal investigations and rude behaviour that transitioned into these players being arrogant, undisciplined, hard to coach, and threatening. Description of the bad black player's play would be either prefaced or caveated by off court issue that were references to criminality or character issues. Again, race was not explicitly mentioned but racist tropes were used in associating crime to poverty, gangs, and aggressiveness. What can be seen is that good blacks were good because they were able to overcome the conditions of being black and bad blacks were bad because they could not. However that narrative was not placing blame on structural forces but rather black pathology. Again, this emphasis on individual effort gives the impression that black people in white dominated countries could be on the same footing as white people only if they wanted to, putting blame on the marginalized community. This notion is able to become a part of the mainstream discourse because media is able to reach large audiences while being able to present racist tropes subtly that are then taken as facts or logical conclusions by the viewing public. Black people are only good if they be good in the way the white elites want them to be good and it's up to the black person to make that choice, and if not then that black person or community is inferior because of some supposed inherent difference between races.

Concepts such as "new racism" and "colour blindness" are important in assessing media and racism. New racism and colour blindness is contingent on the belief that

discrimination against visible minorities is no longer a factor in contemporary society (Trevino et al., 2008). The belief is that the access to opportunity and privileges is equal between all ethnic groups. This means that the actual reality of having racial groups be more or less advantaged is theorized to be a result of a deficiency in certain individuals and cultures. The colour blindness aspect of believing that anything that can be done for social equity has been done so it allows for white supremacy, dominance, and privilege to be defended (Ferber, 2007). In the past, racial stereotypes had been given a justification of biological difference. With new racism not being easily detectable, those stereotypes can now be attributed to something being wrong with black culture. No matter the rationalization, it is a way of not addressing the actual reasons of inequality.

### **Media and Black Masculinity**

There is a certain paradoxical admiration that eventually leads to commodification of the black male body in things like rap music and certain sports while at the same time having their images invoke fear (Ferber, 2007). Western dominated media has through various mediums including news media and pop culture, formed and informed what the correct expression of black masculinity is (Christensen, Gill, & Perez, 2016).

Neoliberalism also plays a role because of the implicit assertion it makes towards personal and cultural pitfalls and personal responsibility. Meaning that failures of black men or various black communities can be looked at as failing of black men to express their masculinity properly (Christensen et al., 2016). Unfair media representation in Canada even can allow for the good and bad dichotomy of expressing masculinity that is racially influenced, in that white men can express masculinity in good ways like being in the military and police whereas the masculinity expressed by black men likens itself to

unwarranted aggressiveness and criminality. Discourse in mainstream western media and elsewhere have given the illusion that black men can be afforded the same opportunities as their white counterparts as long as they perform masculinity as outlined by the white owned media. This simplistic notion of social mobility that does not mention structural and systematic racial impediments promote the idea that black men need to break from their deviant cultural background and become more like white elites (Christensen et al., 2016). This idea of having black masculinity as depicted as purely binary can be problematic. Having a white defined good black man and bad black man, make deviations from white defined appropriate masculinity seen as dangerously aggressive and give rationale to containment strategies. This can be portraying the bad black man as inherently violent.

The construction of black masculinity is that of them being inferior and violent whereas the construction of white masculinity, because of white supremacy is able to be constructed as being entitled and to be able to have control over others (Ferber, 2007). Black men are seen as still being able to be tamed by white men. This gives the impression that white supremacy or white male superiority is simply a rational conclusion to the supposed deficiencies in black men. The idea of the black male in mainstream media and discourse gives the impression that black men are not appropriate for professional career, not good fathers, and need to be tamed, justifying their over representation in the criminal justice system and the unequal access to resources (Ferber, 2007).

The possible reason that media analysis of police brutality focuses specifically on racial and gendered stereotypes is perhaps that racial and gendered stereotypes can be a

factor in police brutality itself. The issue of police brutality may even be an issue that is more complicated than holding prejudice. It may also depend on gendered stereotypes and its accordance with the intersection factor of race. The concept of overt masculinity is often associated with criminality or violence. Violence can be used as an individual or collective proof of masculinity or a response to a perceived attack on that same masculinity. The relationship between masculinity and white supremacy can lead black men to be emasculated materially and culturally (Harris, 2000). This is because black men are denied the opportunity to jobs, financial, and political power that allows control over others, especially in a society with a history of enslaving black people. Black men historically have been seen as docile to inherently brutish and violent (Maynard, 2017). So while black men have can have the typical notion of masculinity that is accompanied by being a self-identifying as male, they lack the moral qualities of “civilized” men that white men have fought to retain for themselves (Harris, 2000). The concept of hypermasculinity can be seen as violence and masculinity converging and can be against femininity and homosexuality. Physical strength and aggressiveness is essential for hypermasculinity. Hypermasculinity can be seen in the practice that is policing. Police are seen a men who are tough, violent, heroic, protective, and ultimately necessary. This juxtaposes the stereotyped masculine black offender and the police officer, the criminal uses violence for evil while the cop uses violence to overcome that evil. Class can be a driving force behind the hypermasculinity in police officers (Harris, 2000). This results in two competing senses of masculinity: one that is hegemonic and authoritative and one that is rebellious and physical. This can be seen in the distinction that is often found in

police departments that see cops who do public relations work as feminine and street cops as masculine (Harris, 2000). Hypermasculinity is so ingrained in policing that violence is always “just below the surface” (Harris, 2000 pg. 796). This means that police brutality from a police department perspective is often dismissed or deemed out of the norm and not a serious problem. Police brutality manifests from the belief that the police need to protect the nice neighbourhoods and nice people from the bad neighbourhoods and bad people. Who gets to be in a good or bad neighbourhood or a good or bad person is determined by different contexts and power structures along racial and economic lines. The concept of police brutality is often assessed through a racial lens which is very important but attention also needs to be given on how hypermasculinity acts as ticking time bomb for the use of excessive force by a police officer. Like in the famous case of Abner Louima who was a Haitian immigrant in New York, who because of police being called to a disturbance at a Brooklyn social club Louima was near, was assaulted by police officers on August 9th, 1997 (Wall Street Journal, 1997). Furthermore, Louima was taken into custody where at a police precinct Louima was sexually assaulted with a plunger and continued to be assaulted by several officers. As result, Louima sustained major injuries to his bladder and colon which forced him to be hospitalized because of the incident (Wall Street Journal, 1997).

Factors that can influence negative attributes given to black masculinity and permeate racism is the concern of needing to tame and control black men, inequality being attributed to deficiency in culture, and white supremacy and white male superiority

being normalized and accepted. Contemporary racism is not exempt from upholding white superiority (Ferber, 2007).

### **Canada and Division**

In doing a critique of media discourse in instances of police brutality in a Canadian context, it is important in introducing the topic of police brutality and media by first disparaging the idea that Canada is a multiculturalism promise land and does not have racism or social inequality. In the back half of the twentieth century, Canada was recognized domestically and internationally as being a world leader in equality and multiculturalism (Maynard, 2017). That label has very much stuck in today's public discourse and is aided by constantly being compared to the political, social, and class division that is very apparent in the United States. However, this reputation is just an empty platitude that is used to falsely cover a harsh reality. The label of positive multiculturalism that is placed on Canada has only masqueraded its own history of slavery and contemporary black issues (Maynard, 2017). The label is not placed by those who are actually oppressed minorities but actually those in power who want to silence resistance to the oppressive status quo. Canada has a history and birth that is steeped in colonialism, racial subjugation, and slavery (Maynard, 2017). Historical examples of this discrimination can be seen in and not limited to: The part extermination and assimilation of Indigenous peoples in the formation of Canada, the Chinese head tax, Japanese internment camps during the second world war, testing Caribbean domestic workers for syphilis without their knowledge or consent, and the destruction of the black Nova Scotia community of Africville (Mullings, Morgan, & Quelleng, 2016). In late March of 2019 a study done on the police tactic of carding in Halifax, Nova Scotia (police stopping people driving in their cars for "random" street check) found that black people were six times

more likely to be carded. The act of street checks or carding is in place for police to document information about a person that could assist in a future investigation (CBC, 2019). That description is very vague and the rate of black people being the most targeted group speaks to the association that police make between black people and unfounded criminality

To specifically zero in on a type of discrimination seen in Canadian discourse and governmental policy is that of anti-black racism of black people in Canada. Anti-black racism according to the African Canadian Legal Council is: “Anti-black racism is prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination that is directed at people of African descent and is rooted in their unique history and experience of enslavement.” (Mullings et al., 2016 p. 23). Therefore, Anti-black racism can be seen in oppression that has historical, social, economic, and political roots. Theoretical framework that can critically give context to this anti-black racism is critical race theory (CRT). CRT wants to emphasize that the way in which a colonial society that is rooted in slavery is anything but race neutral. These societies like Canada are in fact set up in way through its institutions and policies to subjugate black people. Examining from a CRT perspective, the mainstream media in Canada is white owned and operated so black Canadians are being constantly examined and not the examiners (Mullings et al., 2016). CRT additionally believes that ridding society of racism is not as simple as removing ignorant beliefs in the individual but rather radically changing the societal structure and institutions that have racism embedded in them (Jeffries & Jeffries, 2017), like the media for example.

Canadian media specifically has been used to reinforce dominant group hegemonic beliefs about minorities. The concentration of Canadian media ownership is a factor in their mistreatment and underrepresentation of minorities. There are multiple media ownership corporations in the same viewing market and total media conglomerates whether they be owned by Bell, Corus, Rogers, Newscap, and Quebecor that have various outlets within the same provinces. This is an issue because democracy and free speech can clash with the concentrated corporate ownership of media that present dominant hegemonic narratives and assertions (Ungerleider, 1991). Canadian media is pressured to increase profitability. This pressure needs outlets to produce news and stories that have intense conflict and lazy characterization based on things like social identity. All while realizing that the consumer population is made up of a majority that is white and middle class thus not needing to cater to minorities, poor people, and the intersection of the two (Ungerleider, 1991). In a study done that examined fear of crime and marginalization in various media articles published in Canada about crime, Collins (2014) found that media represented the offenders of crime and the victims of crime differently when different ethnicities were involved in a said crime. More specifically, Collins (2014) observed that often when Canadian media had a crime article where the offender was non-white; the article would make reference to poverty. When an article had a white offender; the articles would often place the explanation at an individual level to establish that criminal behaviour is not typical for a white person. When victims of crime were not white; articles often made reference to suspect gang affiliation. When the victim was white; a majority of the articles used more positive and innocent language in their description.



Results referenced show disparity in the media portrayal for the same crimes depending on whether the offender and victims were non-white or not. Clearly Canadian media in reporting cases of crime showed a stark favouritism to white offenders and victims. The framing that was done in Collins' (2014) study was that crime was portrayed as something out of the normal for white people to be committing. Minority victims supposedly deserved their victimization and white victims were portrayed as the most vulnerable. Media reporting tactics shown on a topic as gripping as crime, show that these themes reinforce negative attitudes towards the supposed criminality of Canada's black population and the dehumanization of black victims in Canada.

Those who have powerful economic and political influence will be the one's having their interest discussed in media, and minorities are underrepresented in positions of economic and political power (Ungerleider, 1991). Diversity whether it be actually represented in media challenges the distribution of economic and political power.

Canadian media helps reinforce central cultural images, ideas, and national narratives. The discourse that is produced from the media reproduces a collective belief system of a white dominant society. In the media, racism can function as ideology, policy or praxis (Henry & Tator, 2009).

It is important to recognize that regionally and nationally dominant new outlet's representation of minorities in colonial societies like Canada is not random. This is illustrated from the fact that minorities are underrepresented in media and pop culture and thus this can reinforces a dominant white culture because of the already established role media can have in shaping perceptions of the citizens exposed to it. As mentioned, the

dominant media corporations are white owned and have a history as such and thus reinforce white ideals being presented as Canadian ideals. In countries like Canada, where the concept of multiculturalism is often legislated upon, the concept of racism is presented in more subtle ways in contemporary society (Mahtani, 2001). Meaning that racism is not so much overt as it is systematical and institutional and thus may go undetected in mainstream discourse. Media representation in Canada by law has to install multiculturalism, however Mahtani (2001) notes that the legislation is not really strictly followed, and when it is the representation is damaging rather than showcasing the positive effects multiculturalism can have. Throughout this literature review, negative representation of minorities can be placed into two broad categories: underrepresented, meaning not given adequate representation for their actual population makeup and misrepresented, in that the coverage afforded to racialized minorities is negative. This misrepresentation that is very much coded within media has resulted in this type of racism as being “new racism” or “democratic racism” (Mahtani, 2001). The ownership in media and the contemporary social hierarchies can therefore influence the perceptions that even the most nationally syndicated of news outlets like CTV or CBC can fall victim to. Meaning that the conclusions that news media can make about certain social issues or social identities are not objective conclusions coming from objective fact. Not in the sense that everything I do not like is “fake news” à la Donald Trump, but rather media organizations serve their elite’s interest in maintaining a status quo that allows them to remain powerful.

**Global Context**

To again focus on Canadian media, literature has already shown that Canadian media can be selective in how they frame victims of crime based on race (Collins, 2014). More specifically delving into the theme of media depictions of black people, police, dissenters and violence find that the themes and associations used are more of the same things seen in academic literature done on other countries. As already mentioned, racism and stereotypes presented in news and print media are very much under the classification of “new racism” and this is important in the Canadian media’s effort to link black people and poverty (Crtichlow & Lauricella, 2018). In a capitalistic societies such as Canada, poverty can be seen as a personal problem and not a systematic problem. Black masculinity has been seen as the problem causer for many poor conditions in black communities because of media rhetoric and subsequent political policy. The depiction of black masculinity specifically being criminal and dangerous is very much political in the sense it is done to create moral panic and anxiety throughout an already anti-black contemporary society in Canada (Crtichlow & Lauricella, 2018). As the theoretical framework will show, CRT’s notion of colourblindness and new racism are important tools in these types of media analysis because of this notion of how racism presents itself is in more subtle ways. The fact that the violence against black people by the state is news worthy in itself is an area of emphasis of the theory. CRT offers an alternative view of a supposed post racial capitalistic society that does not have objective laws that are morally superior and has racism present itself in non-overt tactics, such as media portrayals. The study done on Canadian media by Crichlow and Lauricella (2018) examined what the overall tone of articles surrounding black people, crime, and the police was. They wanted

to determine whether the coverage was overly positive of black people or police which was a main focus of the study in the context of crime and criminality. The data was coded in the context of frames relating to gangs, guns, poverty, drugs, unemployment, violence, or crime reduction. With framing in mind as well as overall tone, two broad questions could be answered: Is the tone heavily one way and are frames heavily relied upon or mentioned equally. Using article from the Canadian news outlet the Globe and Mail, the study by Crichlow and Lauricella (2018) found that the overall tone in the articles was neutral and not heavily pro-black people or pro police. With the tone not necessarily indicating bias, focus in the analysis could be placed on the frames and their usage. Gun violence was the most referenced frame, followed by gang activity, then poverty, drugs, and finally unemployment. Essentially meaning that the frames often present in stories of black people and police are violent and the only positive frame looked for in the study was not statically significant. News reports on things that create panic and anxiety like crime serve as a way to form an ideological binary between dominant political parties and white people and non-white people. An allocation of resources that allow for elites to maintain their status would be in jeopardy if an influencing institution like media was advocating for equity along social lines such as race and class and not producing narratives that only assist in letting the privileged remain as such. The Canadian black population can be faced with lack of state investment in black communities, actual rehabilitation programs, affordable housing, poverty, and racist policing which of course does not make up a majority of the news articles on black people and police (Crichlow & Lauricella, 2018). For example, Crichlow and Lauricella (2018) found that black youth in

Toronto engage in behaviours that are seen as dangerous by law enforcement which leads to criminalization that can be reinforced by mainstream media and political policy. Even in Canada, minority communities are the focus of a disproportionate amount of news coverage in relation to crime. News media has a narrative structure in the method of which they convey events. Stories are framed by identifying those in the right, those in the wrong, and the people who witness the confrontation. Therefore it can be apparent who is good and bad and that they are in opposition. It makes it easier for the reader to understand what happened and why. This narrative structure that makes these roles identifiable also translates that all of the actor's actions are personally motivated and choices based on the actor's rationale (Ungerleider, 1991). Journalism proclaims that when it is good it's independent, its balanced, and its objective. In a sense they believe the narratives they produce are in line with the three proclamations because "Journalism, like any other storytelling activity is a form of fiction operation out of its own conventions and understandings and within its own set of sociological, ideological, and literacy constraints" (Ungerleider, 1991 p. 161). The ideology of Canadian media is of course not neutral so even though it think it's fair and accurate, it's succumbing to its own institutional internal biases.

Media under or misrepresentation of the non-white minority seems to be a staple of media in countries with histories of colonialism and slavery that have led to a society where white people have specific privileges that allow them to occupy spaces of elite status. As shown in the reference to specific instances of media blaming black victims of police brutality in the United States, American society is very much the pillars of using

media to create a society in which “new racism” is accepted. In the United States, young black men are probably the most associated social identity with crime (Welch, 2007). It’s not hard to observe the link this can create with racial profiling that is done by law enforcement in the United States that is evident in the examples of police shootings mentioned previously. What this creates is a vicious cycle where media and other discourses give false credence to racial profiling that results in treatment of black people that is done by law enforcement, that is then spun into more negative associations that empower racial profiling. In the United States, this association between black people and crime existed since the end of slavery but was amplified due to the war on drugs in the 80’s under the Reagan administration (Welch, 2007). Essentially extremely harsh drug laws were in place to rid drug users and sellers from society rather than treating them and because the laws applications were racist and classist, there were mass amounts of poor black people funneled into the criminal justice system. This resulted in black Americans being overrepresented in prison and blamed for the drug problem in America. The war on drugs focused on laws surrounding illicit street level drugs and thus the criminality link between law breaking and black people was entrenched into the American zeitgeist (Welch, 2007). Studies on news broadcasts in Chicago found that black suspects were often visually represented by their mugshot or footage of them in police handcuffs more than other suspects (Welch, 2007). In the United States there is also the practice of not including a black person’s name in crime media which further serves to strip any personal identity and replace it with the identity of being criminal. Having legislation and media almost work together in creating associations between specific identities and criminality

give credence to the hypothesis that the manner of which black people are portrayed in crime media is actually more important than the sheer number of times they appear. The concept of “racial hoaxes” that are amplified by the media also influence racial profiling. Essentially a racial hoax is crime story that includes the race of the perpetrator (often black) that ends up being false in that the perpetrator was not black or the crime did not occur (Welch, 2007). However the media amplifies this association and any follow up corrections will not likely gain as much traction as the original allegation. The rationale in needing to include an offender’s race in police and media reports is that it may be already looked at as believable because of existing racist associations between black people and crime (Welch, 2007).

The act of media collaboration with law enforcement and demonizing black people is not foreign to the England either. Also they have a somewhat similar histories in the subjugation of black people. The point of highlighting the process in countries that are not Canada is to show that the process of media contributing to the demonization of black people is connected to histories of subjugating. In England, killings of minorities in contact with police are rarely ever portrayed as police misconduct and like found in the United States, blame the racialized victim (Erfani-Ghettani, 2018). British media even went as far too even demonize protest and dissent that came from these deaths. This practice can be seen in the examples that Erfani-Ghettani (2018) cite which is the story of victims of police violence Jermaine Baker and Mark Duggan. Media emphasized both victim’s supposed gang activity as a reason for being killed by police as if it was a logical conclusion that those involved in gang activity would make a cop murder them. Even

when details were released such as Baker may have been asleep at the time of the killing, the Daily Mail in England said that was not an important detail because Baker was a criminal (Erfani-Ghettani, 2018). Azelle Rodney was a victim of police brutality and reports soon after her death alleged she was waving a gun at the time of her death, when that was confirmed false, rather than treating her like a victim the narrative switched to her being a crack user and dealer (Erfanti-Ghettani, 2018). This idea that if someone is sometimes engaged in illegal activity in either the present or the past makes them able to be treated by police in any manner is certainly heightened when that victim is black in colonial societies with white dominant social hierarchies (Canada, U.S., and England). What occurred numerous times in England was rather than the police department being portrayed as an institution that has far too much power and not enough scrutiny, the police come off as being under resourced and the last line of defense in a well-functioning democracy (Erfani-Ghettanni, 2018). Erfani-Ghettanni (2018) notes that this media framing changes the narrative from police accountability to the fact that black communities are in disarray and need social order restored by a heavy police presence. The efforts of media to demonize victims of police brutality and the subsequent dissent leading to confrontation in England can be perfectly seen in the battle of Lewisham in 1997. The battle of Lewisham involved clashing protest groups with young black people and the fascist National Front Political Party in conflict, the area that housed many black people was over policed a black youth were harassed by police frequently. When fascist marched in their area, the black protest responded and police intervened and pushed back against the black youths (Erfani-Ghettani, 2018). Having socially disenfranchised youths



pitted against a mobilized organization of fascist, the police chose to be on the offensive against black youth. Even though the National Front were the ones who were aggressive in their marching tactics, media blamed the violent confrontation on the anti-racist and anti-fascist protesters, additionally the media downplayed black resistance to fascism by claiming the counter protests were purely ideological on the youth's end and not a response to the marches (Erfani-Ghettani, 2018). In England, even politician's being critical of police use of force or being critical of subsequent media coverage of that police's use of force have been smeared in news publications. To try and counter this narrative that is overly critical on a supposed black pathology, black publications being critical of policing in black communities were described as extremism in bigger publication in England (Erfani-Ghettani, 2018). Even having black dissent to police violence and overall political mistreatment dismissed whether it be in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada can serve as to paint that dissent as a political belief rather than a resisting reaction to a harsh reality. An assertion that mainstream media have published in England, is that a critique of the police would reduce recruitment numbers, thus the police would be understaffed and crime, an issue that relates to community safety, would be pervasive. Whether press has any influence on recruiting future officers that is an extremely small price for actual analysis of police-minority relations in England (Erfani-Ghettani, 2018). Media in colonial states allow state forces to kill with impunity because those whose existence is dissent and those who dissent against mistreatment are painted by the media and other institutions as extremist and treasonous.

Distorting claims for justice by painting them as politically resentful is a tactic the press has partaken in the colonial states in service of state violence.

Perceptions caused by the media are especially important because they have been shown to influence when potential jurors are tasked with making decisions on verdicts in criminal proceedings. There has been academic work done on examining the influence that media framing has on the perception of those who are victims of violence (Dukes & Gaither, 2017). This influence does not just translate into perceptions about minorities in public discourse but rather can influence sentencing opinions in criminal law. In a study done by Dukes and Gaither (2017) that looked at how negative versus positive black stereotypes influence sentencing opinions and placing of blame, found that stereotypes impacted the harshness of the sentence recommended and blamed assigned to a shooter or victim. Furthermore, they presented a mock scenario of a shooting as a result of a traffic accident with racially stereotypical names for the role of victim and shooter. What Dukes and Gaither (2017) ultimately found was that when positive black counter-stereotypes were used for the victim, black shooters were found to be more at fault than white shooter. There was less blame for victims with the counter-stereotypes who were killed by a black shooter as opposed to a white shooter. Black stereotype information about the victim garnered less sympathy from the participants. Participants also identified with the behaviour of the white victim when there was a black shooter. Negative black stereotypes about the victims garnered more sympathy of the shooter. Participants even had more sympathy for a white shooter than a black shooter when the victim was black. Participants were more likely to suggest 1st degree murder for killings against victims with positive

black counter-stereotypes, it tracks then that participants were more likely to suggest justifiable homicide when negative black stereotypes were given to the victim.

Participants were marginally more likely to suggest involuntary manslaughter for a black shooter compared to a white shooter when the victim was given negative black stereotypes. Black positive counter-stereotypes led to harsher sentencing recommendations, in particular, when positive black counter-stereotypes were placed on the victim, the black shooter got a harsher punishment than the white shooter. This study illustrates that there is a potential for media and other types of influence to persuade jurors in hypothetical trials, which are supposed to weed out bias.

### **Canada and Police Brutality**

As already stated, Canada is not associated with police brutality or state violence as much as the United States but that does not mean it is not an issue in Canada or that there should be minimal focus placed on it. Amnesty International Canada (2018) has expressed concern with the weapons that are allocated to Canadian police officers. Specifically Amnesty International is concerned with the use of Conducted Energy Devices (CED's) like TASERs for example. Guidelines for the use of the weapons were federally developed in 2010 (Amnesty International Canada, 2018) but the guidelines are not binding. The agencies that use these weapons, like police, present them as "less lethal" weapons (to traditional fire arms) yet they have deadly consequences. Amnesty International Canada has outlined five categories of these "less lethal" equipment that can have human rights abuses: Restraints (Fixed cuffs and restraint chairs), Kinetic impact devices (Police batons and rubber bullets), riot control agents (tear gas and pepper spray), electric shock devices (Tasers and stun batons), and Acoustic devices and other

technologies used to disperse crowds (audible sound waves and water cannons). Clearer standards are needed in Canada on an appropriate use of this weaponry as to minimize misuse of tear gas, rubber bullets, and electric shock equipment against protests and detainees for example. Equipment has to be in line with international human rights laws and standards (Amnesty International Canada, 2018).

There is no actual governmental agency or police force that has database of Canadian police brutality statistics necessarily but Katie Nicholson and Jacques Marcoux published a report via the CBC as part of their Deadly Force report, earlier this year released that looked at police brutality in Canada since 2000. What this CBC report found was that the number of people who have died at the hands of Canadian police officers is 460, and in approximately 70% of those instances, the victims had mental health or substance abuse problems. Those two statistics suggest that Canadian police are ill equipped with training for dealing with those suffering a crisis and relying on violence. This can give indication to an entire different type of prejudice, one not of race per se but of mental illness. A prejudice rooted in society that believes people who have mental illness are inherently sporadic and criminal. The criminal justice system in Canada historically has not been kind to people of colour or people with mental illness and that can be seen in the treatment those population receive from police. Considering intersectionality is important because it allows an examination of cases of police brutality involving people of colour who also have a mental illness. CBC's "Deadly Force" (2018) report also found that while Caucasians victims almost make up the majority of victims in the data base, when the countries' ethnic composition is taken into account two ethnic

groups are distinct in that their victim percentage is much greater than their than population percentage: Black Canadians and Indigenous Canadians. This finding gives credence to the issue of police brutality being an institutional issue rather than an individual officer issue. This is because as previously mentioned within this paper, those two populations have been historically oppressed and marginalized by Canadian government agencies and its white normative population, an extension of this historical and contemporary violence can be seen in its various police forces. An additional report done by Trevor Dunn in the CBC (2018) found that from the beginning of the twenty first century, that more than a third of victims of police brutality in Toronto were black. Furthermore Dunn's (2018) article via the CBC found that Toronto's population is less than ten percent of the city during the time of the report and thus another instance of the proportion of the victims are much higher than their actual community. The piece goes on to detail that there were fourteen unarmed black victims during that time and seven officers have faced charges in a total of seventeen years and fifty two incidents.

### **The Relationship of News Media and Policing**

The study has already briefly touched on examples of media and police collaboration but it is important to explain why the type of relationship exists and persists. The police and media can benefit from each other, take gang violence for example where you have a topic that is being policed and also draws considerable attention when covered in crime media. At the same time this media can either explicitly or implicitly suggest for additional police resources when there is an identifiable threat (gangs) getting considerable attention in public discourse (Gravel, Wong, & Simpson, 2018). Garland (2008) explained how the sensationalism and dramatization of crime in media have given

police and the criminal justice system more powerful resources in the vain of social control. In the same rationale, crime media or media in general by way of misrepresentation can suggest a social type is more of an imminent threat than others. Police departments wants in terms of resources is better achieved if media place an emphasis on the dangers of a particular social ill. The reason this relationship between the media and police exist and works is because what each institution is striving for is somewhat similar, the media wants attention by way of dramatizing crime, and the police want this resulting societal worry as a way of collecting more resources (Gravel et al., 2018). Even media that is not traditional news, like pop culture, for example portray police in a way that supports the right realist idea of law and order (Reeves & Packer, 2013). It is interesting to think about how policing can use the platform of news media and other types of media as a way of outlining knowledge surrounding criminally and criminal justice issues. With a relationship that can produce a more punitive stance on crime, that can become the preceding notion on what can be concluded from studying crime regardless of what academia has to say. Police and media relationships can even intersect between media amplification and legislation in that the use of media by resistance forces has in some cases forced police's hand to monopolize on media thus making dissenting media outlawed or illegal. Therefore the police has a monopoly on public displays of violence but also has a monopoly on the use of media covering said topics (Reeves & Packer, 2013). Media has been found in their crime media diversion to be more focused on police productivity and results rather than their role as a governing force within society (Skolnick & McCoy, 1984). Police can be said to reflect the qualities

of the most local governing entity. In turn, police are not so much of a rule of law but that a response to a particular set of politics and policies. So while on one hand the police made be looked upon more favourably within that particular community, they can also become more vulnerable to being corrupt, inefficient, and unprofessional (Skolnick & McCoy, 1984).

### **Problem Statement/Contribution to Knowledge**

Assessing Canadian media's use of racist tropes in descriptions of racialized victims of state violence is an important media critique. This is because, mainstream news media that is syndicated and reaches regional and national audiences, is one of the many societal institutions that help maintain a white dominant racial hierarchy in Canada. Looking for the institution of media going out of their way to protect another racially oppressive institution, the police, is another way to showcase that news reports are not objective telling's of events but rather a narrative set in place as to not challenge the status quo. The contribution to knowledge is adding to mainstream media critique in Canada through a racial lens and focusing on state violence and police brutality, issues disproportionately faced by minorities in Canada.

### **Research Question**

The research question for my thesis is: Has Canadian media relied on victim blaming language and racial stereotypes in their portrayal of black victims of police killings in Canada?

### **Research Objective & Aims**

The ultimate objective of my research is to collect a sample of various Canadian news articles from dominating and syndicated news outlets pertaining to police brutality against black people via the internet since 2014 and assessing the objectiveness of the

reports or whether Canadian media relies on the oppressive tropes. If that ultimately is the case, the aim is to stress the harmful discourse that media like this can produce and that mainstream media should not rely on police department statements in their articles and that the authors or outlets possess self-reflexivity in not trying to blame the victim before all the facts are known or not implicitly implying criminality of the victim when it is not relevant to the incident.

### **Theoretical Framework**

While this thesis is very much an investigation into actual content of news article, there are theories that factor into an investigation of societal institutions and racial subjugation. A theory that can assist this thesis is tenants of critical race theory (CRT). CRT is of the opinion that racism is ordinary and normal, society operates on racism being in place and thus represents the status quo. Some of CRT's tenets include: the normality of racism, the social construction thesis, the differential racialization thesis, and the voice of colour thesis (Trevino et al., 2008). CRT asserts that because racism has become so ingrained in present day society, it's hard to identify and address racism (Delgado & Stefanic, 2007). This means that a colourblind treatment of society will not rid society of racism. Another important assertion for CRT is that there is an interest convergence of material determinism meaning that while white elites certainly benefit from racism, but also working class people gain a sense of superiority over black people. With those notions and assertions in mind, CRT explains that race is socially constructed and is very much a product of social thought (Delgado & Stefanic, 2007). CRT challenges the notion of race consciousness being racist and colour blindness being non-racist. Race consciousness considers the racialized social context and lived reality of oppressed



minorities. Colour blindness essentially believes in the assertion that non-racial factors explain racial disparity phenomena's, thus overlooking systematic and institutionalized racism (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010).

CRT believes that the concepts of racism and colour blindness are not contradictory (Trevino et al., 2008). This means that different institutions that ignore the implications of race or where discrimination based on race is illegal, replicate racial hierarchies that are similar to the ones established during slavery, colonialism, and apartheid. This means that while CRT examines the complexity of racism in social interactions, societal institutions, and lived experience it also tries to account for the racial power imbalances that are apparent in academia and the communities where academic research is conducted.

Popular images of black people have changed over time with different stereotypes. During the period of slavery, black people had been portrayed as happy-go-lucky and were fine with serving their masters orders. Conditions change and slavery is no longer practiced and now that same social group is portrayed as brutish or animalistic. CRT is suspicious of liberalism in the sense CRT believes it impedes ways of achieving racial justice just like its opposition, conservatism (Delgado & Stefanic, 2007). To perhaps combat racialized violence against minorities, CRT stresses that a critical examination needs to be taken on what communities need more policing and what type of policing or community oversight is actually needed rather than just dogma police philosophy (Delgado & Stefanic, 2007). CRT takes into account economic conditions, history, politics, and other disciplines in examining racism (Shanthi & Sujith, 2013).

CRT also critically examines the ways in which society is ordered and governed as to assert that those processes are not race neutral. In fact, society's structures and institutions are specifically set up to subjugate black people in societies built on slavery. As seen with the method of counter storytelling, CRT is promoting and privileging the voices of those who have experienced oppression in finding out the many ways this subjugation occurs (Mullings, Morgan, & Quelleng, 2016). CRT is not necessarily an epidemiological theory but rather a methodology that can assist researches and scholars in keeping in mind the principles of equity while conduction research based on race and racism (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010). CRT can also give an interesting perspective on why it is that sentiments that rationalize and legitimize the destruction and persecution of black bodies are so pervasive. What contributes to the stigmatization and stereotypes of black bodies that see them as disposable, CRT says that the media and the discourse it produces can contribute (Mullings et al., 2016). Like many media outlets in the United States, Canada's are white owned as mentioned, and operated. Ergo, black Canadians are the ones being looked at and not the lookers. Canadian media historically over reports on violence in black communities. Canadian media excessively reports on black Canadian gun violence to perpetuate stereotypes of black people as criminal. Even though Canada's most notorious criminals are white men (Robert Pickton, Clifford Olson, and Paul Bernado), black youth are the ones who are the, no pun intended, poster child for violence and violent crimes (Mullings et al., 2016).

CRT takes the concept of race and treats it as a central feature or law and policy. Different social institutions contribute to this white dominated racial hierarchy that is

pervasive in western culture (Law, housing policies, media, family norms etc) (Trevino et al., 2008). In the context of CRT, the concept of media can be described as the totality of means of communication like newspapers, radio, and television (Jeffries & Jeffries, 2017). The media has powerful influence in giving legitimacy to systematic policies and societal bias because technology can acquire power over society by those whose economic hold on said society is the greatest (Jeffries & Jeffries, 2017). Meaning that, citizens are presented ideals through the media that reinforce elite power dominance. In contemporary colonial society, whiteness is assumed as the norm, this is reinforced by legislation and the criminal justice system firstly, and the media also play a role. Local news have reports at nauseam on black suspects who have robbed, raped, or threatened the whiteness purity of colonial society. Even in the aftermath of Michael Brown's death at the hands of a police officer, media were far more critical and detaining when speaking of the subsequent riots rather than the actual murder (Jeffries & Jeffries, 2017). In reporting of instances of police brutality, the media can put more focus on the actions and intentions of the unarmed victims rather than the force used by law enforcement. Black male behaviour is viewed as oppositional to societal norm expectations, meaning that white people and police officers feel justified in using excessive force against a falsely perceived threat of violence (Jeffries & Jeffries, 2017).

### **Scope and Limitations**

The scope of this thesis is 39 news articles of Canadian mainstream news outlets surrounding seven instances of black men in Canada being killed because of direct police violence or their deaths being exasperated by violent police actions. The seven victims

are: Nicholas Gibbs who was killed on August 21st, 2018 by a Montreal police officer after officers were called to break up a fight between two men. According to police, Gibbs had a knife; Bony Jean Pierre who died on March 31st, 2016 after being shot in the head by an officer as Jean Pierre was fleeing during a drug raid; Abdirahman Abdi who died on July 24, 2016 after Police were called to a coffee shop because of Abdi allegedly assaulting patrons in the shop; Pierre Coriolan who died on June 27, 2017 after shot, tasered, and hit with a car by police after they were called to an apartment building because someone was in crisis; Andrew Loku who died on July 5, 2015 after he was shot dead by police who were called to Loku's apartment building because of complaints about Loku's behaviour; Orlando Brown who died on June 22nd, 2018 after being tasered and physically assaulted by officers, when arrested and brought back to a holding cell, Brown went into medical distress due to swallowing plastic bags filled with drugs; Alain Magloire who died on February 3rd, 2014 after being shot by police who were called because of a disturbance Magloire was causing with a hammer. The articles range from 2014-2019 as that is the years the various cases took place. The articles are a mix of national outlets and more regionally specific outlets and because the cases were in Quebec and Ontario, the regional specific outlets are also in Quebec and Ontario. The national outlets used were: CBC News; National Post; Global News; Huffington Post Canada; the Globe and Mail; CTV News. The regionally specific outlets used were: MTLBlog; The Suburban; Montreal Gazette; CTV News - Montreal; Ottawa Sun; Ottawa Citizen; The Star (Toronto); CTV News - Toronto; Simicoe County News; CTV News - Barrie; Barrie Today; TBNewsWatch. The reason for having outlets be at a national level

and a more regional level is for the purpose to examine the discourse at those two levels and whether a national story is more biased than an outlet in close proximity to the incident. The range of articles in regards to time passed since the incidents range from the same day, in some cases, to twenty months later and this was to account for articles that were written when investigations ceased and if charges against the officer(s) was laid, preference was given to article written within three months of the incidents.

Limitations of this thesis is firstly it is only looking a news media discourse of police violence and racialized victims in a black male context and cannot conclude what the Canadian news media portrays in respect to police violence against black women or Indigenous people of Canada for example. Additionally, these case are from Ontario and Quebec so while it is not a stretch to say that Canadians no matter what province or territory, there exist a chance they have been exposed to news coverage from either CBC or The National Post, but Canadians not living in those two provinces may not often be being exposed to outlets that has their reader base be made up almost all people who live in that particular province, city, and town. However Ontario and Quebec are the two highest populated provinces (World Population Review, 2019) in Canada. Limitations as far as methodology go are typical to that of qualitative content analysis, the coding and theme formation are subjective and thus can be influenced by the author's implicit or explicit biases. Content analysis also falls victims to the fact that it can be purely text based and not considered the greater context surrounding the production of said text.

### **Methodology**

The methodology of this thesis was a content analysis that involved reading all of the articles included in the study and to identify specific words or phrases that speak to a

much larger group theme. The themes developed were based off of the scheme used in Stone and Socia's (2017) study on media coverage into the murder of Tamir Rice by a police officer and slightly modified to account for things not mentioned in that scheme, for more context, see Stone and Socia (2017) . This was because there were specific codes within these articles. The articles were analyzed in respect to the amount of themes that appeared in total articles, by individual, by national outlet, by regional outlet, and by published date from incident. The themes formed are as followed:

- **Theme (1) Unwarranted rationale of the officer(s).** This theme was observed in narratives being presented that the particular officer(s) involved had no other conceivable choice than to seriously harm or kill the victim. This can be seen in articles written before any investigation had been concluded or charges laid where words and phrases such as “had to”, “self-defense”, and as descriptions of the actions taken by the victim being violent without actual confirmation or certainty were present.
- **Theme (2) Irrelevant information pertaining to the victim (to the victim's detriment).** This theme was observed in personal information included in articles that spoke to the victim's lifestyle, the location of which they lived or where the incident took place, reference to past criminal indiscretion or existing criminal record, or vague descriptions of their actions as being harmful. This can be seen in making context less reference to the victims poverty if applicable, drug use, employment status, disparaging the condition of particular locations. Another phrase that applies is “known to police” as it implicitly applies criminality even though there is no way to credibly verify that claim.

- **Theme (3) Binding the particular community to the police.** This is observed in articles having an emphasis on bringing up the importance of policing in a particular community and the irrelevant instances of past officer actions that in affect connect the community values to the police's values and thus paints anyone who comes in confrontation with the police as being an outsider of the community.
- **Theme (4) Police portrayed as less harsh euphemisms.** This theme is observed in less harsh words being used to describe officer actions to portray their actions as less malicious than they were as a way of absolving the officer. It can specifically be observed in examples like "hit" or "struck" being used for "shot" or "subdued" in place of being violently arrested or assaulted.
- **Theme (5) Passive descriptions of officer(s) actions.** This theme is observed in events being portrayed as a result of the actions or cognition of objects and not the officer, thus distancing officer involvement in violent and deadly outcomes. This can be seen in actions being portrayed by being done by weapons, vehicles, and bullets while not including that an actual human officer is why they occurred.

### **Research Findings**

Before classifying results by victim and showing actual examples within each text, broadly the results are: thirty nine articles on police killings of black men garnered twenty three mentions of rationalizing the police actions to perpetrate violence the victim gave no choice in action; thirty four mentions of irrelevant victim information that has racial undertones in the articles whether it be referencing a victim being known to police, past criminal record, or location of which they lived and where the incident occurred; eight reference to inclusion of police statements that binds the specific community to the police

and gives the impression that the police always keeps every member of said communities safety in mind and that the victim is not included in the notion of community; there were twenty mentions of euphemism themes that describe police actions as less harsh than what they were thus giving the sense that the police actions were not actually violent; there were nineteen mentions of passive account of police action that take away police autonomy and giving action and intent to equipment and other non-human objects.

In reference to specific codes within the themes, one can observe that the use of implying criminality to racially victim blame is extremely apparent. There were twelve references to either a past criminal record or being “known to police”, a phrase that is extremely vague in that circumvents due legal process and implies criminality on part of the victim.

Individual Case Breakdown:

**Nicholas Gibbs:**

In the five articles used to examine to media discourse on the shooting death of Nicholas Gibbs there were several blatant quotes of rationalizing the police officers deadly actions with four of the articles at least containing one mention of it. Mention of Gibbs past criminal history was often brought up as a way to demonize the victim and imply that this past made Gibbs deserving of his fate. Additionally the phrase “known to police” was used, further implying Gibbs criminality and making this outcome appear as a fore gone conclusion.

“Aside from dealing with assorted fraud and forgery charges, Gibbs recently pleaded guilty to an assault charge as well as for resisting arrest” (Sevigny, 2018, August 29).



Use of passive language themes were also used to take away severity and agency of officer action with uses of phrases such as “following a police shooting”, intentionally being vague as to disguise who the shooter was. Also two of the articles had a heavy focus on the location of where the incident took place and where Gibbs resided, that attention was negative and spoke to how dangerous it was.

"This building is getting worse and worse," he said of the apartment complex next door to his. "Nothing good to say about it. Plenty of drug dealers, prostitutes and unfortunately nothing we can do." (CBC News, 2018, August 21).

**Bony Jean Pierre:**

Bony Jean Pierre had mentions of every theme outlined in the coding scheme and in particular had a heavy emphasis on euphemisms and passive portrayals of officer involvement. There was language of describing Jean Pierre as being shot at with a rubber bullet as being struck by a projectile from an intermediate weapon, a lot of useless jargon to convey Jean Pierre was shot and a rubber bullet hit him that minimize the violence done to him and lessening the impact of the death to a black body. Thus not only was the description of the officers' actions lessened as referring to Jean Pierre being struck or hit rather than shot, the language also protected the officers agency by having it seem as if the intermediate weapon had its own agency and pointed itself at Jean Pierre.

“During the police operation, two suspects tried to flee the scene. That's when one of them was "hit by an intermediate weapon projectile," according to a statement by Montreal police.” (CBC News, 2016, April 1).

The above quote even refers to Jean-Pierre as being simply a suspect. Irrelevant information used to victim blame was also seen because Jean-Pierre was shot during a drug operation. Essentially this was done as to put blame for Jean-Pierre being shot on himself for being involved in illicit drugs.

“Christian Gilbert hit Jean-Pierre Bony in the head with a plastic bullet as the man was trying to clamber out of a window in the building where the police operation was taking place.” (The Canadian Press, 2017, May 25).

Once again the narrative produced supersedes the act of a judge by already deeming them criminal. There was also use of the inclusion of police tactic by giving the impression that the officers are the important members of the community and the victim is not, a real egregious example here that also contains a reference to past criminality:

“In this case, Jean-Pierre had a criminal record, while Gilbert was once awarded for bravery by the SPVM after he was shot and injured during a police operation five years ago.” (CTV Montreal, 2017, May 24).

### **Abdirahman Abdi:**

Media discourse surrounding the death of Abdirahman Abdi included various tactics in blaming the victim and the use of less violent euphemisms to describe events as less brutal than they were. An interesting tactic that was seen in some of the articles was mentioning that the officer involved was specialized in gang related policing, a detail's relevance that can only be for the purpose suggest even more criminality on Abdi's part.

“Multiple sources have confirmed to CBC News that the two officers under investigation are Weir, a patrol officer, and Montsion, who usually apprehends

gang members as a member of the direct action response team (DART) but on Sunday was assisting on patrol.” (Jay, 2016, July 27).

Articles had no issue in describing the alleged assaultive behaviour Abdi was engaging in before the arrest but again described the cop’s actions as being vague and unsure of whether or not the violence committed during the arrest was mainly the police, Abdi, or someone else.

“The Ottawa man who died this week after a confrontation with police seemed to be suffering from depression and was looking for a job in the days leading up to the incident, according to his former boss.” (Scotti, 2016, July 27).

#### **Pierre Coriolan:**

Media Discourse surrounding the death of Pierre Coriolan mainly made use of irrelevant information used to victim blame for reasons such as where he lived and because of his supposed violent behaviour. The reference to location was seen sparsely throughout the articles but in Coriolan’s particular case it was done to describe how run down it was and associate it with irrelevant information such as a random crime that took place years prior as well as criminalizing poverty.

“Two years ago, a 54-year-old man died after being stabbed in a basement unit in the same apartment building. The 36-unit apartment is governed by Montreal’s subsidized housing organization.” (Sidaway, 2019, March 1).

Additionally there was use of passive language of the officer’s actions and gave the impression that the onus should be placed on the police equipment because no actual

officer was involved. “Coriolan died in hospital after he was struck by several bullets” (Paling, 2017, July 3).

**Andrew Loku:**

Media discourse surrounding the death of Andrew Loku focused on victim blaming in that it centred mostly on Loku’s alleged behaviour that would rationalize a police officer taking his life. A particular excerpt describes the actions of Loku as something that a video of the incident may not confirm.

“Twenty-one seconds – as Shime determined – with two men shouting orders to drop the hammer, which Loku ignored as he began walking towards them, visibly tightening the grip on his weapon, not-so-visibly (on security camera footage) raising his arm as if to strike.” (Dimanno, 2017, June 14).

There was also another use of referencing location as a way of the tactic of demonizing Loku, this quote mentioning that the community visibly has issue with the police, as if a reactionary phrase from a song written on a piece of wood is important.

“The apartment now contains the letters FTP (an acronym for "F\*\*\* the police") in black on the plywood covering where police broke the glass to get into the building.” (CBC News, 2015, July 9).

**Orlando Brown:**

Media discourse from the seven news articles surrounding the death of Orlando Brown had a heavy emphasis on irrelevant victim blaming, euphemisms, and rationalization. The victim blaming came from various references to Brown supposedly resisting arrest “violently” and being in possession of illicit drugs. Additionally, news

articles rationalized the officers behaviour because Brown was “known to police” and referencing an outstanding warrant against him. To make the police actions seem less harsh, euphemisms were used to make it seem as if any distress Brown was in was due to his own actions.

“The family of a man who died after an encounter with police in a city about 100 kilo-metres north of Toronto is demanding the officers involved face charges.” (Bowden, 2018, July 11).

Making it seem as a violent arrest perpetrated by the police was a regular encounter. An article that did not immediately try to cover for police and deface Brown made use of quotes from people who actually knew Brown and did not emphasize irrelevant criminality.

“The man, who wanted to only be identified as Dee and who was unaware of the reason why police were looking for Brown, says that no matter what the reason, the 32-year-old didn’t deserve to die and he feels that at the very least, protocol wasn’t properly followed and believes someone needs to be held accountable.” (Gibson, 2018, June 25).

### **Alain Magloire:**

Media discourse surrounding the death of Alain Magloire featured heavy emphasis on passive language use and inclusion of the police statements that subsequently included expurgation of the victim. The taking away of agency of police is done in the officer’s benefit and the narrative appears as if the action is a result of the weapon and not the police officer acting.

“Brassard said the police car that struck Magloire was intended as a diversionary tactic, aimed at gaining a few more seconds.” (CBC News, 2015, January 15).

Again there is information that is included that is irrelevant other to than showcase that the officer or officers in question could do no wrong because of their connection to the community, a courtesy the victim is often not given.

“Constable Denis Côté was hailed as a hero and awarded a medal of bravery for helping to end the shooting at Dawson College in 2006. But the 31-year police veteran found himself on the hot seat on Tuesday when he testified at the public inquiry into the death of Alain Magloire, a mentally ill man who was fatally shot by Montreal police last February.” (Ayala, 2015, January 20).

**Table 1: Individual Case Breakdown**

Name of Victim	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5	Number of Articles
Nicholas Gibbs	7	7	0	0	1	5
Bony Jean Pierre	2	3	2	5	5	5
Abdirahman Abdi	0	3	3	3	1	6
Pierre Coriolan	1	5	0	3	2	5
Andrew Loku	3	7	1	1	1	5
Orlando Brown	1	3	0	5	2	7
Alain Magloire	9	6	2	3	7	6
<b>Totals</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>39</b>

### Discussion and Analysis

#### **Regionally Specific and National Coverage**

The results were also analyzed to show if there were any considerable trends or differences in the use of the themes in regionally published articles and nationally published. There were 17 national articles coded that had theme 1 referenced 11 times (65%); theme 2 referenced 18 times (106%); theme 3 referenced 4 times (24%); theme 4 referenced 13 times (76%); and theme 5 referenced 13 times (76%). There were 22 regional articles coded that had theme 1 referenced 12 times (55%); theme 2 referenced 16 times (73%); theme 3 referenced 4 times (18%); theme 4 referenced 7 times (32%); and theme 5 referenced 6 times (27%). Both national and regional coverage had a majority of articles contain references to officer rationale only leaving the option for violent force and victim information that is majorly irrelevant to the matter at hand to the victims detriment. The rate of the use of inclusion of police statements was the same. The stark difference is the use of euphemisms lessening violent action and passive accounts of officer action that give the impression they were not involved at all, both of which see much higher rates in national articles. Also the use of irrelevant damaging information used to disparage the victim is also very apparent in both sections of articles but extremely so in the national articles.

**Table 2: Regional vs. National Breakdown**

	<b>Theme 1</b>	<b>Theme 2</b>	<b>Theme 3</b>	<b>Theme 4</b>	<b>Theme 5</b>
<b>National (17)</b>	11 (65%)	18 (106%)	4 (24%)	13 (76%)	13 (76%)
<b>Regional (22)</b>	12 (55%)	16 (73%)	4 (18%)	7 (32%)	6 (27%)

**Article Discourse Within 3 months of the violent incident**

Of the 39 articles in the sample, 21 of them were within 3 months of the particular incident and a majority of those were within the first 5 days of the incident. The reason for examining the articles for this specific time frame is because it can be well before an investigation is probably concluded and charges still will have not been laid if applicable. It looks at how the stories are portrayed when perhaps the full story is not known and the media will dictate what the narrative is going forward. As Stone and Socia (2017) note, the first stories down are often to be read far more than follow up stories published months later. This analyzing saw 54% of the articles have 10 of the 23 total (43%) references to theme 1; 16 of the 34 (47%) total references to theme 2; 2 of the total 8 (25%) references to theme 3; 15 of the total 20 (75%) references to theme 4; and 10 of the total 19 (53%) references to theme 5.

In examining the tropes that present themselves within Canadian media discourse surrounding police killings of black men, two large subsets of language tactics that present a distorted objectivity can be seen: presenting the victim of someone needing to be killed because of their actions, history, and danger to public safety and the need to either justify the officers' actions to the extreme or remove the human component of the officer all together. It is worth noting that the way the cops lose human agency is not the same way that the victims are dehumanized, one is done for the benefit of the officer and the other is done to the detriment of the victim. This idea of dehumanization of black men in media or pop culture discourse can go hand in hand when looking at state violence. This is because the method of dehumanizing done by the dominant in group to someone in the minority out group allows for state violence to be acceptable and doable. The study



done in a Canadian media and case context found that a very high use of rationalizing the officers' actions, expurgation of the victim, use of euphemisms, and passive accounts of officer action. The actual study done by Stone & Socia (2017) on the police killing of Tamir Rice found that the use of expurgation of the victim whether that be by describing his actions as menacing with a weapon or asserting the refusal to submit to police orders was used to justify the actions of the officer having to kill Rice. Irrelevant information used to victim blame dominated the current study where that was then used to rationalize force by the officer. The use of verbiage such as wielding, threatening, and other aggressive terms were also seen in the articles analyzed for this study. The study also found great use of articles describing the officer's actions as passive and replacing the words such as shot or killed to something less violent. The themes of portraying the officer's actions as less violent and passive accounts of the officer's actual actions were present in the current study at about the same rate in the totality of the articles. Even with a news article talking about brutality or a police killing, the use of euphemisms that are less harsh than what actually occurred conveys to the reader that the actions were not severe and thus do not warrant an actual legal or critical response. Being passive in the cop's action as to deprive them of agency is a way of having violent action be present but the onus is not placed on the officer causing it. Describing officer actions of shooting a gun in painstaking detail is done to seem as if it was the object's own cognition that caused the action rather than the officer's. The statements "the officer shot the victim with a gun that contained rubber bullets" and "the suspect was hit with rubber bullets that was discharged from a gun" are very different, the former having the cop being the shooter

and the latter having the gun seen as acting on its own fruition. In the attempt to victim blame African-American victims of police brutality Smiley and Fakunle (2016) found that racist stereotypes related to almost non-human physicality and reference to past criminal history was often used as a way to implicitly suggest that these racialized “criminals” deserved to die. Additionally Smiley and Fakunle (2016) also found that referencing the victim’s retroactive poverty and conditions of their living space was mentioned in a negative way as to further demonize the victim. The current study also found references to location that was seen as another way of expurgation of the victim because of insulting that someone living in poor conditions is not contributing positively to society and thus their death is ultimately inconsequential and their bodies do not matter

Examining what was found in accordance with what Critical Race theory has said about media and “new racism” also sees similar conclusions about race and discourse. First of all, CRT is absolutely correct in that the dominant western narrative at least is that society is “post-racial” or that racism is not a dominating factor in racialized people’s experience, and because of this, actual racism goes undetected (Delgado & Stefaniec, 2007). Not seeing racism as being an issue in contemporary society because slavery or the Jim Crow era of legislation is currently not a living reality does not mean the removing of those things made racial disparities disappear. This is in line with media or the wider viewing public not taking issue with including irrelevant information in news articles pertaining the police brutality and racialized victims because the article is not explicitly calling the victim a racist slur. This ability for dominant white institutions like mainstream media to be able to define what is appropriate black masculine expression is

because of this notion of colour-blindness. The idea of colour or race not being a contributing factor to a person or group's societal condition allows for discourse to focus on individual down falls and to find fault in that specific person or culture. This means that reference to poverty and other poor living conditions give the impression that it is the fault of the person of colour.

However seeing these references devoid of context as racism is the ultimate goal, and being more critically engaged in topics surrounding race relations is the process towards honest and useful conversations surrounding racial disparities in Canada. This "new racism" can be seen in various avenues of media whether it be in pop culture or more traditional news media. The focus on media as a facilitator of more subtle types of racism is because of the role and influence media has on perception (Jeffries & Jeffries, 2017). As mentioned, media has many stakeholders that are almost able to control the type of narrative produced, and that narrative instills the power that those same elites has. This rationale in mind can be seen in the need of the media to protect the police, it's not outrageous to suggest that the police and the media in Canada benefit from one another. Whether that be for the purpose of mutual sources or that they are both so entrenched into the Canadian fabric that the media will often take the side of the powerful institution over the individual. Then add that the individual in this case is a minority that already is unfairly treated in Canadian media (Crichlow & Lauricella, 2018) and that adding the concept of criminality also does not bode well for black people either (Collins, 2014). It is easier for Canadian media to racially blame the victim of police brutality than it is for them to critically question the institution of policing itself and the way police treat

minorities. Seeing the national and regional article breakdown show high rates of victim blaming and furthering racist stereotypes is disheartening because those are the articles that are going to read the most by Canadians and others because they come from such large outlets. It is important to note that this study does not need to be a comparison between ethnicities in Canada. There is no merit in establishing whether white people are looked upon more favourably in news coverage in comparison to black people because it is already established that media in Canada is unfair in their treatment of racial minorities and that whiteness is privileged in various institutions within Canada. Furthermore, and as already mentioned, a comparison between racial minorities like Black people and Indigenous people was not done because of the belief that only black people are discriminated in Canada but rather this study wanted to establish that this tactic of racist coverage happens for a specific social group period and not that it happens worse for one minority than another.

The national and regional breakdown also show that national articles can be far more likely to lessen the violence perpetrated by the officer and trying to remove the officer from the narrative altogether. Again, the reach of these articles can amplify that violence was not actually perpetrated and an association is not made between police violence and racial minorities and thus can further stigmatize incidents of police brutality. Whether it be making the well-established racist associations between black people and criminality or poverty and going out of their way to make the officer seem as a passive actor and not violent the racism is apparent. Canadian news media and very much of its discourse is still taking the side of the racially oppressive institution rather than perhaps

giving more critical contextual account to cases of police violence. The need to critically examine the relationship between police and news media is needed desperately. To critically question why police need to give information to the media surrounding things not about the specific incident whether it be lifestyle or past criminal discretions and why news media publishes it. This can speak to a much larger issue of the media being hesitant to criticize policing because of access to sources or just off of history. There are more people that media can reach out to, to form narratives on police violence against racial minorities who are not the perpetrators. Further research should place focus on news media narratives surrounding police brutality and Indigenous Canadians, as well as looking at how race and gender can dictate narrative. It would also be important to look at how other forms of state violence perpetrated against racialized victims are portrayed and whether the act is protected by mainstream media. It also may be beneficial to examine the discourse surrounding immigration into Canada from media and whether those portrayals influence public perception of the issue itself.

### **Conclusion**

This thesis has been aimed to add to literature surrounding media narratives and portrayals concerning nonwhite racial minorities. Canada is not a multicultural promise land and has a history of racism and subjugation that still persists today. What is important about contemporary studies into Canadian division is to highlight that new racism is prevalent and needs to be more critically examined and discussed because that will lead to proving that a post racial and colourblind era of discourse and reality is false. To reiterate, this thesis uses the example of police violence and brutality as a focus but in no way concludes anything surrounding how to curb the issue of police brutality or give

suggestions to police training. The suggestion to Canadian readers is to read news articles surrounding race relations in Canada and violence against racial minorities more critically and question why things are being portrayed in certain ways, additionally it may be useful to seek out alternative media sources that give more historical, social, and political contexts to racism in Canada. Defending white institutions and making racist implications about victims is just one of the many ways news media and general media in Canada has further subjugated nonwhite minorities and they are not the only institution of course to do so. Racism is bad when it is identifiable, there is an argument that it can be worsened when it is not, because it cannot be meaningfully addressed. While the names of Nicholas Gibbs, Bony Jean Pierre, Abdirahman Abdi, Pierre Coriolan, Andrew Loku, Orlando Brown, and Alain Magloire can somewhat crudely be seen as units of analysis in this thesis, it is important not to forget that they are human beings that had their lives taken from them and then were defaced by news media and failed by various institutions within Canada. Furthermore, and not speaking for the victims friends, family, and supporters views on closure, the issue of police brutality and media cannot cease at charges being laid and employees fired or reprimanded. Change and progress cannot cease at an individual level and needs to be institutional. Canadian media, especially those that are mainstream regionally and nationally have a duty to give racial minorities respect, and if news media discourse continues as is, it will only worsen the perceptions of racial minorities that can feed into discourse and even legislation that will further subjugate nonwhite people and legitimize a white dominant societal hierarchy whether Canada wants to admit it or not.

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